

## Chapter 2

Feather was in his room, the door locked. The potion had worn off, and he was a dragon again. This made it easier for him to write, as he was more comfortable holding a quill in his hand than a pencil in his mouth. Taking a quill and a piece of paper in his hand, he began to write a letter. His first plot was in motion.

It was a formal letter, made out to a new investment firm that he'd spotted while walking through the streets of Cloudsdale. Some ponies with some idle money that they thought they could turn into more money by lending it to the right ponies. Well, Spike had a plan for that.

"Feather?" the mare asked, knocking on the door. "Are you all right in there?"

"Just a minute!" Spike said, throwing open one of the suitcases. There were still more vials of the potion, and he was able to gulp one of them down.

He then remembered the unpleasant process of the transformation – his skeletal structure changing, the skin softening, the wings sprouting out of his back. He shook his head, walking over to the door and unlocking it.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm fine." He said, nodding his head. "It's just... locks on doors. Makes me feel secure. Before now I didn't even have... doors."

The mare walked in, concerned. "Have you really been on your own this whole time?"

"Feels like it sometimes," he said, sulking.

"You're not really an orphan, are you?" she asked.

*Uh-oh.* He tried to think fast, make something up, but she was onto him.

"Did you run away from home?" she asked. Her tone was not accusatory – just an honest question.

He nodded guiltily.

"What about your friends and family?"

"What about them?" the colt asked. "They probably don't even miss me."

"I'm sure that's not true," the old mare said, "they're probably very worried."

“Maybe.”

“I’m sure they love you very much.”

Spike didn’t say anything.

“It’s okay,” she said, “you can stay here as long as you like before you decide to go home.”

“I think I probably shouldn’t go on holiday with you.” He said. “I mean... if I decide I want to go home while it’s happening.”

“Are you sure?” she asked. “Will you be all right?”

“Yeah, pretty sure.” He said.

“Well, if you think so.”

*Sweet.*

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He went down to have breakfast before depositing his letter in the mailbox. He was nervous in doing this – until now he hadn’t really done anything that he couldn’t undo. He could just go back, now, and return the suit and the apples and all that, and he’d probably be grounded for a month, but this was different. This letter was the start of a game that he couldn’t afford to lose.

And yet he felt excited. It was a game where the odds were against him, but if he could keep his wits up, he could win, or at least have one wild ride before getting caught.

The pegasus couple left for their holiday, leaving Feather alone in the house, as per his request. They trusted him enough. Besides, they’d insured everything of value in there. Twice.

Feather, however, would not need any help. After the old couple had gone, he checked the mail. Sure enough, he’d gotten a response. He grinned. They’d be coming to meet just the next day. Everything was perfect so far, but there was still much more work to be done.

He walked to his room and opened one of the suitcases. There were all the apples. Counting them to make sure he had enough, he shut the suitcase and headed down to the kitchen. If there was anything else he needed, it should be there. His hosts wouldn’t mind him using some of their stuff for cooking, right? They expected him to eat, after all?

He had several sheets of paper – recipes. Recipes for apple pies, cakes, crumble, fritters... he was good at cooking – one of the tasks he was supposed to carry out. Even as a pony, he wouldn't have too much trouble whipping together a few treats. That'd be all he needed. He'd be fine as long as he had apples left over.

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Spike stood in front of the mirror. This was the important part. If this didn't work, he couldn't do anything. He had a small vial with him. Closing his eyes, he removed the stopper and gulped it down. He felt himself spurt upwards, and when he opened his eyes, he was bigger – he looked like he was the same age as Twilight Sparkle and her friends. That was a relief – exactly what he wanted. Unfortunately, there was one problem: no cutie mark. He didn't expect to have one, but he was still kind of disappointed. Nevertheless, he had a backup plan: the suit. He quickly put it on (which posed more than a little difficulty, being that he was new to doing this stuff as a pony). He stuck his wings through the holes in the back of the suit, spreading them. Wings. He had wings as a colt, of course, but he didn't really think of them as being very useful. Here, he could feel like they were actually fully functional limbs. He liked them. As a dragon, he often found himself wishing he had wings like the bigger dragons.

When he was finished, he looked in the mirror. He smiled. The formal suit, combined with his scruffy-looking mane, made him look professional, but kind of edgy. That was something he thought he could have going for him. "Like, I mean business," he said to himself, "but I'm hip and stuff." He stopped. His voice was much deeper now. "Sweet." He said. He winked at the mirror. "Lookin' good, Spike. Lookin' good." He walked out of the room, before walking back in.

"Sorry," he said to the mirror. "I meant 'Feather.'" The grin dropped from his face. "I need a better name..." he muttered.

There was a *ding-dong!* from downstairs. Spike rushed down the staircase and to the front door, wondering how they had doorbells on clouds.

He went to the front door and looked through the peephole. There were two young male pegasi, one blue and one white, standing outside, dressed very formally. These were the ones.

*On your marks...* thought Spike.

"Welcome!" he said, throwing the door open. "How do you like my place?" he asked, leading them in.

"It's nice..." said the white one.

"I'm Bloomberg Wingling," said the blue one, pressing his glasses to his face. "This is

Whitacre.”

“Are you Feather?” asked Whitacre, the white one

“Indeed I am.” Feather said. “Follow me, Bloomberg and Whitacre” he said, leading them into the dining room. He’d set up three chairs – one at the head of the table, and two, one on either side. In the middle of the seats there was a bowl of apples. Spike took the seat at the head of the table. He smiled as the other two sat down.

“So,” said Bloomberg, taking out the letter that Spike had written, “I understand that you think we should invest in your... apple business?”

“That’s what I wrote, isn’t it?” Spike responded.

“Obviously,” Bloomberg said, putting it away.

“So, the idea is that you’re planning on starting an orchard?” asked Whitacre, “and you want some starting capital.”

“Correction: I’ve *started* the orchard,” Spike said, producing a photograph of several apple trees. In reality, he’d merely taken a picture of a small section of Sweet Apple Acres. “It’s already a success – I just thought to myself: ‘What’s the point of all that money if there’s nopony to share it with?’”

“If it’s already a success, why do you want our money?” Bloomberg asked.

Spike paused. He’d imagined himself as a silver-tongued charmer – now it turned out that he wasn’t. “Well, successful for it’s size. But it needs to grow.”

“Seems... fairly mundane, though,” Whitacre said. His voice was a lot softer than Bloomberg’s – Spike took notice of this. “I mean, apples? Everypony has apples.”

“Of course it’s mundane,” Spike said, leaping at Whitacre’s query. “It’s the mundane things that we can be the most sure of. Everypony has apples, you say? Well, it’s simple – everypony *wants* apples. Everypony *needs* apples. They’ll always be there,” he grabbed one of the apples from the bowl. “This... this right here is our lifeblood.”

Whitacre backed down a little, but Bloomberg didn’t move. He remained unflappable. Spike looked at him. “Eat it.” He said, holding out the apple. “Just try it.”

“I’m sure that the apple tastes just fine,” said Bloomberg, “I’m just not sure why it needs my money.”

“Misters Wingling,” Spike said, “I am a businesspony looking to expand. If we want the orchard to be bigger, we’ll need a lot of water and employees.”

“Awful young to be an apple tycoon, I think,” Bloomberg said. This was proving to be a lot harder than Spike thought it would be.

“Mr. Whitacre, you don’t get to be in my position at my age without knowing a few things,” Spike said, a confident smile on his face, “and I know a lot of things. And you know one thing I know? Apples.”

He got up from the table. “One moment,” he said, exiting the room.

“Well?” Bloomberg asked Whitacre, “what do you think?”

“He’s confident, at least,” Whitacre said.

“There’s more to running a business than putting on a show,” Bloomberg said.

“Well, like he said, he’s already got the orchard up,” Whitacre said.

“True...”

The doors flew open, and Spike was pushing a cart through, covered in a white cloth. “Not convinced?” he asked. “Well, how about now?” he whipped off the cloth, revealing all manner of apple treats – cakes, pies, crumble, caramel apples, and so on. “This is just a fraction of what I can make from the orchard. Expand it, and we can put these pies into every shop in Equestria. And then, we can have the pies in every home in Equestria!” he held up one of the pies, that self-assured grin on his face. He looked at them. Bloomberg adjusted his spectacles – he at least looked interested, and from the look on Whitacre’s face, he’d already been won over. Spike placed the pie on the table. “On the house,” he said.

“I thought this was about an orchard,” said Bloomberg, “not a bakery.”

“You’re thinking too *small*,” said Spike in hushed tones. “Look at Sweet Apple Acres. They sell their own apple goods, too.”

“He’s got a point,” said Whitacre, taking a bite out of the pie, “oh wow!” he said, his mouth full.

“Chew your food properly,” Spike said.

Whitacre swallowed. “It’s really good,” he said to Bloomberg, who had cocked an eyebrow.

“I suppose...” Bloomberg said, “All right.” He pulled out three sheets of paper and a pen from a saddlebag. “We’ll sign on with you.” He gave one sheet of paper to Whitacre and

one to Spike, who eagerly read over the paper.

“Oh, wow...” he said, “that’s a lot of money...”

“And we expect to make it back,” Bloomberg said, “Since we are the primary investors, we will have some say in the running of this. Your venture better make a decent amount of money, otherwise we will liquidate it. Is that clear?”

“Crystal.” Spike said, taking a pen and signing his assumed name.

“And here,” said Bloomberg, passing another paper to him. Each of the pegasi signed the papers, and Whitacre wrote out a check.

“We’ll be contacting you,” Bloomberg said as they walked out the door, leaving Spike alone in the room.

Utter silence. Spike ran back upstairs and looked out the window as the two brothers walked away. Quietly, he walked into the living room of the house.

“WOOOOOOOO!” he shouted, followed by bouts of laughter. It was incredible. He couldn’t believe what he had just done. He’d just taken the first step – he’d scammed a sizable amount of money from two investors. Oh, Bloomberg wasn’t stupid – he thought he had his bases covered, what with the whole thing about ownership in the company, but that was the thing – there was no company. They wouldn’t *get* that money back, and they had no way of finding him. He’d made a scam, and he was going to get away with it.

Humming to himself, he walked the front doors of the mansion, off to cash his check.